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ABSTRACT

Many alternative schools established in the late 1960's and early 1970's eventually dissolved or became as traditional as their predecessors. This paper offers an organizational explanation of the failure of alternative schools. The author discusses criteria for identifying alternative schools and suggests a three-stage developmental model describing the school's progression from euphoria to psychic upheaval to dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction stage evenutally results in one of three possible outcomes for an alternative school: dissolution, movement toward more traditional forms, or resolution of dissatisfactions and retention of the alternative character. Anecdotal evidence from two case studies is presented to support the developmental model. The author suggests that successful alternative schools have developed a well-integrated and formalized, yet pluralistic and individualistic, structure capable of supporting a complex instructional program. (Author/JG)

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AN ORGANIZATIONAL EXPLANATION OF THE FAILURE OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

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Much of the work of the Environment for Teaching Program emphasizes organizational approaches to school problems. This report takes such an approach in analyzing possible reasons for the failure of alternative schools.

Contents

Abstract iv

What Are Alternative Schools? 4

What Kind of Students Did Alternative Schools Attract? 6

Case Studies of Two Alternative Schools 7

A Stage Model of Alternative School Development 9

The Euphoric Stage 11

The Psychic Upheaval Stage 12

The Dissatisfaction Stage 13

The Solution in the Urban and Community Schools 14

Dissolution or Return to Traditionalism 15

Possible Explanations Underlying the Stages of Alternative School Development 16

Some Implications for Alternative Schools 20

References 22

Abstract

Many of the alternative schools established in the late 1960's and early 1970's failed: they either dissolved or became as traditional as the schools they had originally moved away from. Economic, political, and anthropological explanations of this failure have been set forth.

This memorandum offers an organizational explanation of the failure of alternative schools. It provides criteria for identifying alternative schools and suggests that such schools went through a three-stage developmental sequence of euphoria, psychic upheaval, and dissatisfaction, with one of three eventual outcomes: the school dissolved, became traditional, or resolved its difficulties while still retaining its alternative character.

Ancedotal evidence from two case studies is presented to support the developmental model and to justify an organizational explanation focusing on patterns of goal definition, feedback, evaluation, and decision making. Alternative schools that survived are seen as having developed an individualistic or pluralistic structure that was also well integrated and formalized and thus capable of supporting a highly complex instructional program.

AN ORGANIZATIONAL EXPLANATION OF THE FAILURE OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Terrence E. Deal

By about 1970, alternative schools had gathered enough momentum for some enthusiastic educators to predict that a movement had been launched which would supplant conventional secondary schooling within a decade. Since that crest, however, the wave of educational reform has receded, leaving in its wake disillusioned and frustrated educational idealists, a large graveyard of experimental schools, and some schools still functioning in name but merely disguising highly conventional practices with a once-worn cloak of innovativeness. A handful of alternative schools continue to grope forward in the spirit of the original break from tradition. A large number of on-campus versions have resulted from the acceptance of alternative ideas by public high schools. But with these exceptions, another educational revolution seems to have come and gone, leaving as one of its chief legacies a reinforced set of conventional beliefs about schools and learning.

Why did so many of these experiments in secondary schooling fail? Several different explanations have been offered. One is that the innovative, humanistic schools failed because they were not achieving important educational goals nearly as well as were schools following a more traditional pattern; hence only the strong survived, and the unfit were discarded. Another is that the downfall was economic: alternative schools withered away because of sporadic or insufficient income. A third explanation emphasizes political causes: alternative schools fell victim to pressures exerted by the "establishment," whose vested interests are protected by conventional schooling. A fourth explanation is anthropological: alternative schools were linked to the humanistic revolution or the "counterculture," and as it waned so did the support for more humanistic schools.

Another appealing explanation has never enjoyed the popularity of the other four. It is that alternative schools failed for internal reasons: they were not able to cope with the organizational problems produced by new authority patterns and by highly complex educational processes. In this view, the development of alternative schools, in general, showed the following pattern. Alternative schools attracted alienated students and teachers. The schools were designed so as to radically alter authority relationships among all the participants, particularly those between teachers and students. Students were granted considerable autonomy, both individually in choosing their own activities and collectively in making decisions for the school as a whole. The result was a very diverse, individualistic pattern of learning activities and a highly egalitarian and informal governance structure. As the schools entered their initial months, these two characteristics triggered a series of developmental stages which led ultimately to dissolution, to a reversion to more conventional education, or, in a few cases, to novel compromises in the educational process or the distribution of authority. In the sociological literature, the stages displayed by alternative schools bear a striking resemblance to those experienced by other new educational institutions (Smith and Keith, 1971) or by leaderless small groups (Bennis and Shepard, 1961; Mills, 1964).

This organizational view of alternative schools suggests that the alternative-school ideology of autonomy, democracy, and "do your own thing" provided the seed of its own destruction. Alternative schools tried to accomplish highly sophisticated educational tasks with an underdeveloped and nearly anarchic structure for decision making and problem solving.

The educational issue raised by this latter explanation is whether many of the interesting and important educational ideas underlying alternative schools ever received a fair hearing. Without divisive internal problems, would these schools have fared better economically and politically? With some knowledge of how to solve internal problems, would they have provided new models for teaching and learning in

secondary education? If the schools failed primarily because they were unable to develop organizations suitable for their complex aims and problems, then we need to give the alternative-school movement a second look--perhaps a second opportunity. Distilling from the earlier difficulties some general guidelines for avoiding organizational difficulties may permit a future test of other aspects of teaching and learning that alternative schools proposed but were never able to implement.

The main purpose of this memorandum is to provide some insights into alternative schools that may revise our sense of their past, help them with present problems, and rekindle an interest in their future--and to accompany these insights with sound guidelines as to how such schools might be more effectively organized. Toward these ends, the paper will draw on two case studies of alternative schools to develop more fully the thesis that the authority patterns in these schools, combined with other characteristics, led to a fairly predictable series of events or stages, ultimately resulting in one of three outcomes: (1) dissolution of the school, (2) conformity to traditional guidelines, or (3) weathering the storm and becoming a fairly stabilized alternative to conventional schooling.

First, however, the paper defines alternative schools and suggests that alternative schools attracted an alienated clientele. Next, it describes briefly the two alternative schools from which a model of development stages was abstracted. Following this preliminary discussion, the paper describes the developmental stages and the alternative outcomes, illustrating these with anecdotal material from the two case studies. Finally, I speculate about some of the processes underlying the stages and discuss briefly the practical implications of the model for existing or newly created alternative schools.

What Are Alternative Schools?

One of the difficulties in discussing alternative schools is determining which schools can legitimately claim the title "alternative." There is a wide diversity among schools calling themselves "free," "experimental," or "alternative." Even among those claiming to be alternative schools there is enormous variation: public vs. private, on-campus vs. off-campus, academic vs. vocational, intellectual vs. growth-oriented. One characteristic claimed by all alternative schools, however, is some sort of departure from the educational status quo. To be an alternative means that there is something from which to depart. In the case of alternative schools, the benchmark is conventional schooling.

A simple, but useful, way to determine the degree of "conventionality" or "innovativeness" is to use six important dimensions of learning: (1) who is involved in learning, (2) what is learned, (3) why it is learned, (4) how it is learned, (5) where learning takes place, and (6) when learning takes place. Using these six dimensions, we can construct six separate scales with purely conventional characteristics on one side, purely alternative on the other. These are shown in Table 1. Of course, on each dimension, a particular school could fall somewhere between the purely conventional and the purely alternative ends of the scale.

Given this scheme, alternative schools can be defined as those which differ from conventional secondary schools on all six learning dimensions. It is possible to think of schools which offer "alternatives" on fewer than six, but at least one dimension. Such, however, would not be what are here called alternative schools.

To some extent the six learning dimensions are probably interrelated, and therefore changes in any dimension may cause others. For example, giving students more autonomy widens the range of subject areas; changing the location of learning to the community increases the likelihood that other than credentialed teachers will be involved.

TABLE 1

Differences between Conventional and Alternative Secondary Schools on Six Important Dimensions of Learning

Learning Dimensions	Conventional Secondary Schools	Alternative Secondary Schools
Who is involved in the learning process (roles)	Certificated teachers, counselors, administrators, students. All have relatively well-defined role expectations.	Teachers, administrators, parents, community members, students--anyone who has something to teach. Certification requirements relaxed; role distinctions blurred.
What is learned (curriculum)	State- or district-prescribed curriculum. Knowledge divided into subject areas. Special programs for non-college-bound or other "special" students. Emphasis on cognitive learning.	Wide variation in educational substance, dictated largely by interest of students; may encompass areas usually taught in school but also extends into many other areas. Emphasis on affective learning.
Why it is learned (authority)	Extrinsic motivation; learning to fulfill requirements, to pass tests. Authority vested in teacher: "do what you are told." Teachers directive.	Intrinsic motivation; learning because of interest or need to know, to learn a skill or to acquire knowledge. Authority vested in students. Student choice.
How it is learned (methods)	Emphasis on reading, writing, listening; group presentation; lecture by teacher common; some audio-visual aids; some discussion.	Methods vary as widely as curriculum; reading, writing, listening not excluded, but emphasis on doing and experiencing; all senses involved.
Where learning takes place (location)	Learning takes place on campus, in classroom. Some field trips, but these are exceptional.	Wide variation in location of learning: private homes, beach, forest, libraries, businesses. Instruction in formal classroom is the exception rather than the rule.
When learning takes place	Instruction typically between hours of 8 and 4; day segmented into periods or modules.	Learning takes place anytime, depending on nature of learning task; infrequent scheduling, no time segmentation.

In point of fact, many of the experimental or alternative secondary schools changed all six learning dimensions, although perhaps the most popular practice among them was to change the "why" dimension of learning from telling students "do what you are told" to offering them an opportunity to "do what you want." The importance of this shift is not to be underestimated, since it transferred authority, or the right to make instructional decisions, from the teacher to the student. It also involved students in determining policy for the school as a whole. Evidence from Henderson (1975) and the few empirical studies that have taken a hard look at the authority differences between conventional and alternative schools lends some strength to the assumption that egalitarian, anti-authoritarian structures were prevalent in the alternative schools (Bredo and Riemersma, 1971; McCauley, Dornbusch, and Scott, 1972).

A final note: The label of alternative is here restricted to secondary schools. Experimental schools at lower grade levels are outside the purview of this discussion.

What Kind of Students Did Alternative Schools Attract?

By and large, the clientele of alternative schools was white middle-class. Exceptions to this were special purpose secondary schools and ethnic schools which included minority students. Although such schools would be considered alternative according to some definitions, most did not increase student autonomy in making decisions; instead, they varied other learning dimensions. The alternative schools which served the white middle-class population, on the other hand, almost without exception changed the structure of authority dramatically.

Most white middle-class students attracted to alternative schools shared more then a socioethnic background; they were alienated from the authority system of the traditional school. Henderson's (1975) study of a suburban high school revealed that 23.1 percent of the student body scored high on her composite index of alienation from the high school's authority system. By comparison, her study of stu-

dents selected for the alternative high school in the same community showed that on the same scale nearly 60 percent of the students were highly alienated from the authority system of the conventional high school. In sum, it seems reasonable that most of the students who attended these schools were white, middle or upper-middle class, and alienated.

Case Studies of Two Alternative Schools

Two important characteristics of alternative secondary schools have thus far been identified. First, the schools called alternative were secondary schools which differed from conventional schools along six learning dimensions, with changes in the "why," or authority, dimension most crucial. Second, the clientele of the schools came primarily from the white, middle or upper-middle social class, and tended to be alienated from the typical authority structure of a conventional high school.

The two case studies to be discussed here met both these conditions. The first was a high school (studied in 1970) within a suburban public school system; the other a privately funded school located in a large city (studied in 1971). In the second school the instructional program lasted for only a semester, not a full school year. Since for each semester an entirely different student body was involved, the one school actually provides two separate case studies.

In both schools, observations during the inaugural year used the full repertoire of field methods available to a participant observer: observations, questionnaires, interviews, and some standardized instruments. Notes were made sporadically, and centative conclusions were pulled together at the end of each case study. During the middle of the first semester in the private school a pattern of developmental stages seemed to emerge. In the final semester of the private school program these stages were focused on and explored in depth.

The public alternative school, identified here as Community School, had 30 students and a teaching staff of three. The school was financed

by public funds and headquartered in two rooms above a town bakery. The students were volunteers from the traditional high school. They were selected because they were disaffected with the conventional high school and because there was no other program within the school district to provide their education. As an interesting twist, the students were identified first, and after the superintendent had selected the principal, or head teacher, were allowed to select the other two teachers from among 120 who applied for the positions. In all respects the school's program was alternative to the conventional high school. The entire community was considered the classroom, and all its citizens were considered potential teachers. Learning activities ranged from ceramics to logic, cooking to communications, dome-building to American history. Students determined what they wanted to study, with their own immediate interests the most important criterion. They were also collectively responsible, with the teachers, for setting school-wide policy. The entire community was used as a learning laboratory and learning activities took place around the clock on a random, unscheduled basis.

The second school, identified here as Urban School, was located in a large city. It was comparable to the Community School but added a residential dimension, since the 12 students and three staff members lived together in a large old Victorian house. The school was an experimental offshoot of an elite private boarding school and attracted older secondary students from wealthy families. The primary goal of the school was to involve the students in the life and work of a large city, with internships in various city organizations as the formal mechanism for involvement. In most respects, the curriculum, methods, and authority structure of the Urban School were comparable to that of the Community School. The curriculum was more focused and the methods more systematically emphasized, but the students were responsible for choosing their instructional program and for making school-wide decisions. With certain limitations, they structured their life style within the school's residential center. Once again, learning could take place anytime, anywhere.

A Stage Model of Alternative School Development

During the first months, the Community School and the Urban School (in each of the two semesters) displayed certain distinct stages. The secuence was remarkably similar in all three instances. From these three cases, I have abstracted a developmental model which may apply to other alternative schools and may help account for their high failure rate or their tendency to return to highly traditional programs.

The developmental stages are shown in Figure 1. The model assumes that newly formed alternative schools placed alienated students in an educational structure that altered all six dimensions of learning.

The initial result of this combination in an alternative school, I suggest, is euphoria. In the first stage all participants in an alternative school--the students, teachers, and parents--are extremely happy and enthusiastic. The dominant theme during the period is "things were never so good."

As the school progresses, however, the feeling of bliss and an exciting beginning gives way to the individual gloom and depression of the second stage. The distinctive feature of this stage is psychological crisis among a majority of individuals in the school, including depression, sickness, emotional outbursts, and erratic behavior. There is a tendency during this second stage for the school to become more of a crisis center than a school.

Almost as soon as the school has stabilized in this second stage, the third stage begins. This is the period of rampant dissatisfaction. Students, teachers, and parents all agree that the school is experiencing great difficulties, is not accomplishing its purposes, and is failing to provide a satisfactory substitute for conventional schooling. Often two subgroups form, one group favoring the original "innovative" charter of the school, the other pressing for a more conventional program and more traditional patterns of organization. But whether or not such subgroups form, the dominant theme of the third stage is a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction among all members of the school.

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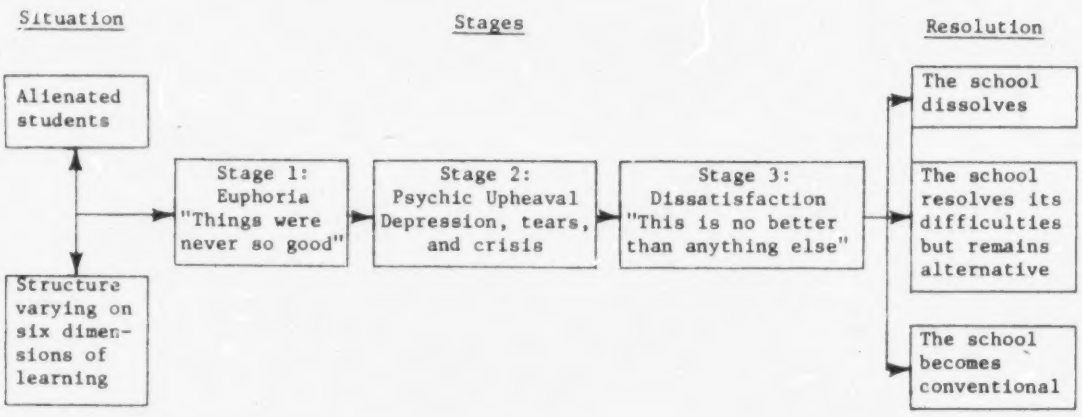
Situation
Stages
Resolution
Alienated students
Structure varying on six dimensions of learning
Stage 1: Euphoria "Things were never so good"
Stage 2: Psychic Upheaval Depression, tears, and crisis
Stage 3: Dissatisfaction "This is no better than anything else"
The school dissolves
The school resolves its difficulties but remains alternative
The school becomes conventional

Fig. 1. A model of alternative secondary school development.

This third stage, I believe, is the critical time for alternative schools. They are faced with a level of organizational instability that must be resolved. Schools resolve this predicament in one of three ways. They may refuse to alter their course and either fall or split apart or voluntarily disband. They may become highly conventional in their governance and approach to learning. Or they may stumble intuitively into some form of compromise in their authority structure and educational program.

This developmental sequence has been abstracted from the buzzing, confusing reality that these two particular alternative schools faced and has been sharpened and refined through the simplifying filter of hindsight. The model is based on three separate case studies. For the most part, the stages do reflect the line of development in each case. In each situation, of course, other and complex processes, pressures, incidents, and events were taking place. Moreover, the specific events

or manifestations of each stage were different in the two schools. The following anecdotal material from the individual case studies should illustrate and amplify the three stages of euphoria, psychic upheaval, and dissatisfaction and identify the final paths taken by the Community and Urban School.

The Euphoric Stage

The beginning days of an alternative school are filled with excitement, romance, and adventure. Brief anecdotes from both the Community School and the Urban School highlight this stimulating beginning.

Community School. At first, students resembled prisoners released from bondage who have spent long hours fantasizing about what life outside is like. Students plunged energetically into many atypical educational enterprises: planting organic gardens, building geodesic domes, planning how to refurbish the school's headquarters, walking on the beach, discussing the true meaning of life, delving deep into each other's personal motivations, discussing at great length the evils of conventional schools and other "establishment" institutions.

Teachers, seeing ideal and long-wished-for teaching conditions implemented, developed premature images of being pioneers in revolutionizing and humanizing modern secondary schooling. Prospective journal articles were outlined and larger schemes to reform the town's main high school were developed.

One parent, ecstatic about her son's new glow and overwhelming interest in school, donated $50 to the school district. The superintendent was hard pressed to figure out the machinery for processing such an unusual donation.

Invitations for teachers and students to speak at parent and community groups were numerous.

The teachers from the traditional high school were the only ones not excited; they were depressed because "a school like that should not work."

Urban School. In the residential center the first meals were festive banquets, often by candlelight. Everyone participated in buying the food, preparing it, and cleaning the kitchen following the meal.

Frequent shopping forays into the city were common. Students spent considerable time making their individual rooms into the resplendent environments they had always wanted to create.

One student, during a collective dinner, remarked that this was the finest school he had attended and the finest educational process he had experienced. He went on to say that he did not ever imagine that "things could ever be like this." His statement was loudly and wildly cheered by the other students.

The Psychic Upheaval Stage

After lasting from two to four weeks, the euphoric period ended abruptly. The transition into the second stage was rapid, and the plunge dramatic and widespread. The manifestations of this psychic upheaval stage included individual depression, listlessness, sickness, crying, and erratic behavior.

Community School. It was not at all uncommon during this time for students to burst into tears in a middle of a conversation. A student walked into the headquarters one day, burst into tears, and was joined by four other students.

Two students locked on to one another, began to talk to each other in "baby talk," and were often seen skipping arm-in-arm through the town.

One subgroup which had formed in the school's beginning began to split apart. The coup de grace came one day when, during one of the group meetings, a girl burst into tears saying that she "could not stand it any more." The group fell apart shortly thereafter.

During this period, one student tried to take his own life.

Parents remained happy that the students were enjoying school and seemed to be getting help in resolving their emotional difficulties.

But parents too were occasionally depressed, and the teachers often received calls from them asking for help with the parents' own emotional problems.

Urban School. Since the students and staff lived together, the staff served a parental function. During this period students often complained of insomnia, backaches, nightmares, and headaches. Drinking and drunkenness increased, as did crying and other emotional outbursts. Students began to go home frequently on the weekends.

The Dissatisfaction Stage

The psychological crisis period lasted four to six weeks, giving way quickly to a period of general disgruntlement and negativism. The dissatisfaction was shared by everyone involved with the school--teachers, parents, students, and the general community.

Community School. Students spent considerable time on the campus of the conventional high school seeing friends, eating lunch, even attending classes. Absenteeism rose considerably. It was not at all uncommon for only a few students even to appear at the school's headquarters during an entire week.

Students were vocal in their criticisms of the school and of the staff for not doing something to make the situation better. But students were unable to describe how they might like to see things changed.

Parental complaints to both the teachers and the district administration increased. Parents threatened to have students transferred to the traditional high school because "in the community school students are not accomplishing anything worthwhile."

The staff was torn between relying on the democratic decision-making process to develop a direction for the school or taking over as a way of preventing the school from falling apart.

Urban School. Long-distance calls from parents began to flood the staff. One parent said "What is going on there? I have lost all faith in private education and I never had any faith in the Urban School."

Students frequently returned to the parent school campus, often spending an entire day and even the night.

One contingent of students at the Urban School felt that the director was not doing his job and complained formally to the founder of the private school which was supporting the Urban School program.

The Solution in the Urban and Community Schools

After a period of dissatisfaction, in all three instances it became quite clear that three alternative courses of action were possible: (1) to let things run their course and possibly destroy the school; (2) to reinstate the staff's authority to make decisions about instructional as well as school-wide matters; or (3) to find a way to confront and solve the difficulties and problems.

Both the Urban School and the Community School took the third option. In both cases the choice of the course was more intuitive and accidental than rational and planned. It was heavily influenced by a strong staff commitment to "failing for the right reasons." By gathering information through questionnaires and interviews and meeting in large and small groups to identify, analyze, and discuss problems, both schools hammered out a course of action which resulted in a shared set of goals. This approach involved adopting an authority position somewhere between the "do what you want" and "do what you are told" extremes. It gave to teachers the active role of developing and expanding alternatives but allowed the students to retain final decision-making rights. It also gave to the staff more responsibility for making school policy. The new structure, stated simply, was "do what you and I have jointly established."

In the Community School, the staff for a time took a firm stand, reinstated conventional high school requirements, and scheduled regular course meetings. Most students seized the opportunity, and others, while shying at requirements, voluntarily pursued highly traditional learning objectives in mathematics, reading, and language arts. But

this return to conventional schooling was viewed by the staff as a stopgap measure to stabilize the school temporarily until some common goals and a compromise in the authority structure of the school could be worked out.

Dissolution or Return to Traditionalism

Faced with the same stage of general dissatisfaction, many other alternative schools fervently committed to the egalitarian and individualistic ideology of the counterculture may have refused to alter authority relationships. It is suggested that this was the group of schools that dissolved and were consigned to the alternative-school graveyard. They were unable to identify options or to solve their internal problems because of ideological commitments. Eighteen months has been generally accepted as an average life span for the alternative schools of the late 1960's and early 1970's. The developmental model suggests that authority issues and the attending consequences contributed to this short life.

A second group of schools took another direction. At the height of dissatisfaction there was a dominant cry for someone to "take over" and bring order into the educational chaos. Interestingly, this plea often came from students who had previously clamored loudly for student autonomy. These students were now willing to sell their decision-making rights to anyone who would tighten the ship. Into this leadership vacuum usually came one teacher or the entire staff. Shortly after, perhaps because the six learning dimensions overlap and flow together, such schools shifted from alternative to conventional in other areas of learning (see Table 1) such as curriculum, methods, community involvement, and scheduling. Authority changes had an effect on all areas of the school. The schools thereafter operated as alternatives only in name. Many such schools continue with the "alternative" label, although the distinction between theirs and a conventional high school program is very subtle.

A few other schools, like the Community and Urban Schools, emerged from the developmental stages as stable, viable alternatives. (The Community School still exists; the Urban School existed for three years.) Most of these probably engaged, at crucial points, in systematic, collaborative problem-solving efforts. Exactly why they stabilized remains a question. But other explanations notwithstanding, it is highly possible that most successful schools reached a compromise in their authority structures or in other ways reorganized the school. From this perspective, organizational compromises often continued student autonomy in decisions about their own instructional program and schoolwide matters, but also gave the staff an active role in defining boundaries and suggesting alternatives. Schools of this type often experimented with student contracts and some form of negotiating process, or developed student projects to set specific instructional tasks.

Possible Explanations Underlying the Stages of Alternative School Development

Thus far, I have relied on the experience of the Urban and Community Schools to develop a descriptive model of alternative school development. I have speculated that alternative schools with an alienated student body and an innovative program (using the six learning dimensions as criteria) experienced specific stages in sequential order and reached a final resolution in one of three ways. I have hinted at the organizational causes of the stages. Such an approach does not rule out other explanations that may be suggested as the processes underlying the stages in alternative schools. Additional explanations may be found in philosophy, anthropology, social psychology, and sociology. My own bias, however, is to stress organizational explanations.

Viewed organizationally, alternative schools were new institutions with vague, diffuse goals and an underlying ideology which emphasized individual freedom, unique experience, and humanistic values. The

schools often existed in hostile, "establishment" environments and because of frequent criticism closed themselves off except to those in the environment who believed as they did. The educational program of these schools, following the goals and ideology, was highly individualistic and discontinuous, and both the techniques of teaching or learning and ways to judge progress and success were underdeveloped or nonexistent. The authority granted to students in selecting learning activities, the "do your own thing" character of the schools, not only increased the diversity of curriculum and instruction but made it difficult for teachers to play much of a role in student learning. The instructional tasks of any one student often involved input from several teachers and, as a result, the efforts of teachers, as well as students, were highly interdependent.

Any successful combination of these organizational features required a highly developed structure to coordinate, support, and evaluate a highly complex instructional program in an often hostile environment. Yet structurally, alternative schools were primitive, undeveloped, fragmented, and highly informal. The counterculture ideology abhors organization, routinization, and bureaucracy, and as a result decision making in the alternative schools was participatory, consensual, cumbersome, burdensome, and ineffective. Problem solving was laborious, although enough problems existed to keep even a well-oiled system working at full capacity.

Using the organizational character of alternative schools as a framework, one may explain the developmental stages somewhat as follows.

In alternative schools experiencing the bloom of Stage One, there was no need for organization. Students and teachers were busily engaged in living our their personal and educational fantasies. Students were able to do what they had formerly dreamed of in classes where instructional activities had been meaningless to them. Teachers were able to provide instruction without the constraints of the conventional system. But as time passed, there were no formally recognized standards to judge such activities, nor was there any feedback for highly individualistic

accomplishments.

Stage Two was a normless, listless, confused reaction to the lack of formal feedback for the learning activities of the first stage. The goals of alternative education were vague and diffuse. In living out their personal fantasies, students and teachers soon began to look for formal validation indicating that their direction was "appropriate." But as they looked for such recognition within the school, they found no goals or consensus, and as they turned their attention outside, they found little if any environmental support for their activities. This situation threw students (and teachers) back on their own resources, and they looked inside themselves for the validation they had expected from without. Such introspection produced a predictable trauma; as its intensity increased and extended to many of the students in the school, the organization began to reward disturbed students by giving them feedback about their personal difficulties through the teachers--ostensibly the formal and legitimate evaluators. This, in the absence of other feedback, quickly led to a negatively based system of evaluation and rewards--having a personal problem was formally recognized and rewarded.

At the same time, teachers were overloaded. They were required to provide counseling, to provide educational leadership for a school whose leadership was supposed to flow from the collective, and to develop and coordinate numerous and highly diverse instructional activities, many of which were neither routine nor within the purview of their professional preparation. Moreover, they were faced with the reality that collective decision making was not working and were frustrated by the power of an ideology which suggested that this was the only way in which problems could legitimately be resolved. Few activities were routinized; this inevitably overloaded the only accepted decision-making apparatus, making it difficult for any problems to be solved. Teachers became overworked, but unable to make needed changes since their proposals were modified or aborted by the consensual decision-making process.

Students, receiving little feedback from teachers, turned to their peers who, like them, were too wrapped up in personal problems

to offer support or assistance. The peer group was highly inconsistent in its values but tended to stress norms of the counterculture. Students began to dress alike, talk alike, and act alike. In frustration, students (and teachers) reached outside to parents and others for some assurance that they were achieving educational goals. But in a relatively hostile and unsupportive environment, they found only criticism and an exhortation to return to conventional patterns. This pattern led quickly to Stage Three.

Stage Three forced upon alternative schools the realization that their organizational shift to the status of counseling or crisis center was unsatisfactory. For some students, the schools had provided a temporary "way station." Now these same students were requesting, even demanding, some highly conventional instruction. But how could this provided when the demands were so diverse? And how could the school become both a crisis center and a conventional high school? Or even if this were organizationally feasible, how could consensus be reached in a highly individualistic setting with the determination of policy in the hands of the entire population of the school?

Clearly, continuing the status quo would result in severe internal splits or in destruction. But, on the other hand, if the faculty or someone else in the school took over, would not that act in itself destroy the integrity of the school? In the absence of clear goals, in an environment which rejected the main learning activities, without a history, without clear means for accomplishing learning or measuring success, without the internal support of individual or informal group norms, without adequate time for the professional leadership to develop direction, how were alternative schools to maintain their organizational integrity?

For many schools the answer was clear: They either went down without striking their colors or returned to the safety of a familiar and friendly port. These were the alternative schools that dissolved or reverted to a highly centralized and conventional system.

Those schools that "made it" did so because they were able to find an organizational middle ground by maintaining a highly individualized or pluralistic structure but one that was also well integrated and formalized. A division of labor was made. Roles were clarified. Students were still given considerable autonomy in choosing learning activities, but teachers were formally given the responsibility for expanding the base of alternatives. Goals were specified, evaluation processes were regularized, and decision rules were established to centralize some decisions while keeping others decentralized and consensual. Boundary-maintenance activities were developed to control and process the flow of negative information from the environment, while specific attempts were made to persuade the parents and the community that the alternative program was highly desirable educationally--by any standards. In short, the successful alternative schools developed a well-knit, sophisticated organization capable of supporting the highly complex instructional program they had chosen to operate. They had compromised somewhat their original participatory, democratic, "hang loose" approach to organization but were able to maintain the integrity of the other elements in their alternative approach to instruction.

Some Implications for Alternative Schools

This organizational explanation is particularly appealing because of its concrete implications for present or future alternative schools. It provides a framework for raising questions and identifying problems that teachers or students can really do something about. Using such a framework, they will have some basis for designing an organization that facilitates rather than impedes their educational aims. They will be able to seek an equilibrium, with compromises in authority patterns or other organizational properties that will enable them to avoid either falling apart or returning to a highly centralized system.

Most importantly, perhaps, the prior knowledge that these developmental stages may occur in the formative months of alternative

schools may prevent the teachers and the staff from rising and falling *with the natural development of the school. They can bring some degree* of rationality to the situation as well as being able to manipulate aspects of the structure to minimize the effects of the various predictable stages.

This paper has suggested an alternative explanation for the difficulties of the alternative secondary school movement. It contends that alternative education was denied a real opportunity to test its basic ideas, because schools organized in such a fashion could not cope with the consequences of a revised authority structure. Alternative schools were initiated mostly by educational idealists who assumed that a new path to learning could easily be found by removing barriers from the old. They did not conceive that the removal of these barriers would produce such overpowering consequences. Neither did they have the understanding, the skills, or the organizational sense to cope with the problems without returning to the system they had wanted to revise in the first place. However, we are older now, and certainly wiser about educational experiments. Despite the fact that former educational critics are now repudiating their first books on the merits of alternative education, this seems an interesting time to continue to experiment with new learning techniques, but in schools staffed with people whose zeal is matched with knowledge of how complex social systems and organizations work.

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